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## THE DURATION OF CHAUCER'S VISITS TO ITALY

Some years ago it was conjectured<sup>1</sup> that Chaucer, being absent from England but 174 days on his first journey to Italy,<sup>2</sup> was there only about two months. My former suggestion<sup>3</sup> that two months for the journey each way is far too large an allowance can be backed up by considerable evidence.

Archbishop Sigeric, returning from Rome to England in 990, apparently took only 32 or 33 days from Aosta to the Straits of Dover.<sup>4</sup> Various illustrations may be derived from the correspondence which grew out of the controversy between Archbishop Hubert Walter and the monks of Canterbury: for example, the prior left Canterbury about the middle of October, or later, in 1198, and even after waiting at Pisa reached Rome 11 Dec.; a letter from the pope to the archbishop was sent from Rome 20 Nov., or later, 1198, and received 2 Jan.<sup>5</sup> Gerald de Barri in 1199, on one of his disappointing journeys to Rome, reached Strata Florida in South Wales on the vigil of the Assumption (14 Aug.), and Rome about St. Andrew's day (30 Nov.), after long delays and detours; that this was exceptionally slow going is shown by the fact that on another journey he reached the Continent 2 Nov., and (even after some small delays) reached Faenza, near Ravenna, "tertio ante Natale die" (22 or 23 Dec.) and Rome

<sup>1</sup> By Dr. F. J. Mather, in *The Nation*, LXIII, 269. Cf. *Mod. Lang. Notes*, XI, col. 424.

<sup>2</sup> *Life Records* (Ch. Soc.), 183-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Modern Philology*, I, 320-1.

<sup>4</sup> *Memorials of St. Dunstan* (Rolls Series, 1874), 392 ff., xciv; he took 46 days, curiously, from Rome to Aosta, about 393 miles, 8½ miles a day as against 14 on the rest of the journey; 5 miles a day for 11 days from Siena to Lucca! Whatever the explanation is, I disregard the Italian part of his route. His after route was *via* the Great St. Bernard, Lausanne, Pontarlier, Rheims, to near Calais. On the usual routes from France over or around the Alps, cf. Bédier in *Romania*, XXXVI, 163 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Chron. and Memor. of Richard I* (R. Ser., 1865), II, pp. cii ff., 451 ff., 458, 466, 477. Cf. *Gervase of Canterbury* (R. Ser., 1879), I, 574-587.

"biduo ante Epiphaniam" (4. Jan.).<sup>6</sup> The itinerary for English pilgrims to Rome found in six MSS. of Matthew Paris's chronicle (13th century) allows 27 days from Lyons to Rome.<sup>7</sup> Adam of Usk, going to Rome in 1402, sailed from Billingsgate 19 Feb., reached Bellinzona (just over the St. Gotthard) 18 March and Rome 5 April; he travelled with no great haste, for when he found an inn to his mind he stopped two days to rest.<sup>8</sup> Miss Mary Bateson states that canons were allowed 16 weeks total leave of absence to accomplish a pilgrimage from England to Rome.<sup>9</sup>

These cases indicate somewhat various rates of travel, on somewhat various journeys, but all parallel or partly identical with Chaucer's; the epoch does not seem to have mattered greatly, as there is no reason why it should. I estimate the distances in accordance with such details of routes as are given in each case; otherwise in straight lines, for on the whole they seem to have been remarkably direct, much more so—not unnaturally—than modern rail routes. Gerald was the slowest traveller, being delayed by various causes, averaging only 10 and 13 miles a day on his two journeys of about 1115 and 840 miles as we have had to reckon them. The

<sup>6</sup> *Giraldus Cambrensis* (R. Ser., 1861-91), I, 117-9; III, 239-241. The first of these journeys was far more than half as long again as Chaucer's.

<sup>7</sup> The itinerary given by Albertus Stadensis (d. after 1256) allows 47 days for the same journey. But this is clearly for travellers afoot, who would naturally go just about half as fast as average horsemen; and who are as clearly those considered in the itinerary relied on by Mather (col. 423-4: 52 days from Calais to Milan, and 16 from Milan to Florence!). For the two others, both *via* Mont Cenis, see Bédier, *Romania*, XXXVI, 167-9.

<sup>8</sup> *Chronicon Adae de Usk* (London, 1904), xxii f., 74-5. He went by way of Bergen-op-Zoom in Brabant, the Rhine and Lucerne, "et ejus mirabilem lacum".

<sup>9</sup> *Mediæval England* (N. Y., 1904), p. 355. The pilgrimage to Compostella seems to have taken six weeks from Ratisbon, according to Berthold von Regensburg, about 1250 (G. G. Coulton, *Chaucer and his England*, London, 1908; p. 141). "Daun Burnel the Asse", travelling from some place north of the Great St. Bernard, reaches Salerno, 30 miles south-east of Naples after twelve days' journey ("bissenas diætas": *Satir. Poets of the 12th Cent.*, R. Ser. 1872; I, 34, 36). Cases more or less pertinent might be multiplied indefinitely; but the above will suffice.

prior averaged at least 15 (850 miles), the canons 16 or more (850 miles from the English coast), depending on where they started and the length of time allowed for sacred sight-seeing in Rome (a week surely would be the very least). The pope's letter and Adam averaged 19 and 22 miles daily (850 and 1021 miles). The cases of Sigeric (450 miles) and the itinerary (576 miles) differ from the others in simply showing the stages without mentioning any pauses for rest or other reasons, such as religious observances; so their rates of 14 and 21 miles a day, while showing what the travellers could have done if necessary, might have to be reduced a little to serve as a guide. If Chaucer averaged 20 miles a day, of course sometimes doing more, sometimes less, and sometimes stopping over a day, he might have covered the 645 miles from London straight to Genoa in 32 days.<sup>10</sup> If we should allow him the very low average of 15 miles a day, this would mean 43 days, but being on a mission he is not likely to have loitered.

Considering all the factors in the case, the fruit of these figures seems to be about this. Chaucer might have taken the journey from London to Genoa in a month, but it is safer to allow five weeks or a little over.<sup>11</sup> This leaves him a good 100 days, nearly three and a half months, for business, study and pleasure in Genoa and beyond.

Dr. Mather thought Chaucer's time further cut down by the need of allowing at least ten days each way for the journey from Genoa to Florence.<sup>12</sup> But in the 14th century it is said to have taken but ten or eleven days from Florence to Naples.<sup>13</sup> Petrarch writes Boccaccio that Pavia is only two

<sup>10</sup> This agrees well with figures as to the duration of the pilgrimage from London to Canterbury; cf. my article in *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc.* XXI, 478-85. The higher speed of a small party would be counter-balanced by the diminished speed of a long journey.

<sup>11</sup> The journeys being in winter and early spring, he may have passed from France to Italy, and *vice versa*, by way of the Mediterranean coast and not over the nearer passes. Cf. Bédier, *l. c.*, p. 163. Yet not only the untiring Gerald but the more leisurely Adam crossed the Alps in winter.

<sup>12</sup> *L. c.*, Col. 424. He is thinking of his pedestrian's itinerary, which allows sixteen days from Milan to Florence.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Hutton, *Giovanni Boccaccio*, p. 15.

days' journey from Genoa.<sup>14</sup> Gerald de Barri goes from Rome to Bologna in six days.<sup>15</sup> Adam of Usk in 1406 left Rome St. Barnabas's day (11 June), and crossed the Mont Cenis on St. Peter and St. Paul's (29 June).<sup>16</sup> On this basis, for the 125 miles in a straight line between Genoa and Florence, over no high mountains, we should allow just about five days, which does not reduce Chaucer's opportunities; travel is hardly the worst way of learning a language, a people and a country.

On his second journey he left London 28 May, 1378, and was back 19 Sept., ——— "eundo, morando, et redeundo, per Cxv dies";<sup>17</sup> the journey was "ad partes Lumbardie", to interview the Lord of Milan, which is hardly as far as Genoa. On the two-month schedule he never got to Milan at all; if we accept that of five weeks, he had nearly a month and a half at his destination.

Altogether, then, Chaucer probably had at least from four to five months in Italy. This is of interest for several reasons. He shows the results, it is true, not precisely as a modern might do; mediaeval writers rarely betray an interest in mountains and cities for their own sake. But these four or five months mean familiarity with the language, and that familiarity with the country (at various seasons, late winter, early spring, mid-summer) which many travellers find stimulates an interest in its literature; they mean perhaps seeing his own countrymen with new eyes when he got home; they mean opportunities for procuring books. At the same time, we should never assume that his acquaintance with all the Italian books he knew dates from as far back as his journeys to Italy; or that as he rode homeward his saddle-bags were bulging with the hundred best Italian books for that desert-island Great Britain; or that he had not opportunities for securing them later, with his wide acquaintance, and possible relations formed with Italy, and with Italian and other merchants at the custom-house.

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<sup>14</sup> *Lettere Senili*, V, 1 (tr. Fracassetti, I, 262), referred to by Hutton.

<sup>15</sup> *Gir. Cambr.* (R. Ser.), III, 289.

<sup>16</sup> *L. c.*, p. 103.

<sup>17</sup> *Life Records*, pp. 216-9.